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Local Architecture Firm Honored For Design of Sustainable Haitian Community Center



Mike Gwin, architect and Principal at Strip District architectural firm Rothschild Doyno Collaborative, led a design project to build a community center in Haiti following the devastating 2010 earthquake.

The Sant Lespwa Center of Hope, in Hinche, Haiti, recently won Rothschild Doyno an American Institute of Architects' national Honor Award for architecture.

"Last Friday, the 2015 AIA National Architecture Honor Awards were announced and the Center of Hope project in Haiti that we designed with World Vision was selected," Gwin said. "This is the first time since 1999 that a Pittsburgh office has won a national AIA honor award for architecture on their own. It is a rare honor for our local art and

design community."

World Vision is an international resource organization that previously worked with the local architecture firm to build a distribution center in Sewickley. For the Sant Lespwa Center, the organization envisioned a community center that would provide educational resources and job training to aid the city's economy.

Today, the 5,000-square-foot facility does just that. Gwin said the center offers classes teaching vocational skills, library resources with books and Internet access, recreation with a soccer field, and music and art resources.

When working on an international project, Gwin said it's essential to visit in order to implement local

nuances into design. He said his trip to Haiti helped the building come together in a way that was natural to the community.

The center was built around a tree grove, which was the natural gathering space for the community of 50,000. Gwin said they also executed a design that reflected local heritage. The area is known for crafting baskets, hats and other goods from palm thatch. Local crafters created palm thatch awnings and other items for the building.

Gwin said more than 100 locals assisted in the construction. It instilled a sense of "shared ownership," he said.

The Sant Lespwa Center of Hope is off the grid, Gwin explained, which means that there

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are no utility connections for water, electricity or sewage. "So, the building had to be self-sufficient," he said.

Rothschild Doyno designed a butterfly roof to collect rainwater through chains into an underground cistern. He said the underground tank had enough room to provide for a year's supply of water. Overflow was designed to navigate into planter areas.

The solar-powered building also supplies power to batteries in the building, which are used to purify water. Before this system, Gwin said the people of Hinche would



have to walk miles to get water.

The building also does not have mechanical utility connections, so there is no heating and cooling. The shape of the roof works to draw breeze into the building,

as does the site's shady location among the grove.

Rothschild Doyno was among 11 winners out of 300 applicants for the competitive AIA award. Bohlin Cywinski Jackson was the last Pittsburgh firm to win in 1999 for the Robert L. Pregar Intelligent Workplace at Carnegie Mellon University.

"It's a very rare award to receive, so you don't ever think that you're going to," Gwin joked. He then added, "It's great to have our local [design] scene reach that national stage."